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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000032

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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MUNICIPALITY ISSUES STATISTICS ON 2009
HOME DEMOLITIONS

REF: JERUSALEM 2020

Classified By: Consul General Daniel Rubinstein, per reasons 1.4 (d).

11. (SBU) Summary. The Municipality of Jerusalem released statistics for home demolitions in 2009, showing that the number of demolitions in (predominately Arab) East Jerusalem decreased slightly compared to previous years. Anti-demolition advocates do not dispute these statistics. They credit USG pressure for the slight change, while noting continued disparities between demolition of entire residential structures in the east versus marginal additions in the (overwhelmingly Israeli) west. The municipality official charged with executing demolition orders described efforts to spot illegal construction in East Jerusalem earlier in the construction process, including through use of aerial surveillance. End Summary.

JERUSALEM MUNICIPALITY ISSUES
DEMOLITION STATISTICS

12. (SBU) The municipality on January 5 published final numbers for home demolitions in 2009. According to these figures, the municipality performed demolitions on 65 structures in (predominately Arab) East Jerusalem, as opposed to 57 structures in (overwhelmingly Israeli) West Jerusalem. (The municipality uses the term "structures" to cover a broad range of construction, including fences, homes, balconies, stables, sheds, or illegal businesses.) Compared with the previous four years, municipal statistics for 2009 indicate the number of demolitions in East Jerusalem is down slightly from the annual average of 76. In its statement, the Municipality noted, "there has been no change in municipal policy or implementation of structural demolitions."

ADVOCATES CHALLENGE MUNICIPALITY'S METHODOLOGY

13. (C) Meir Margalit -- Jerusalem city council member and activist with the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) -- told PolOff that the actual overall number of demolitions in East Jerusalem was slightly higher than the figure cited by the municipality. In addition to the 65 demolitions conducted by the municipality, Margalit said, three residents conducted self demolitions in order to avoid fines, and the Israeli Interior Ministry demolished an additional ten structures. Nonetheless, he said, "this was the first time in several years that (municipal) demolitions decreased, and this was thanks to American pressure." He also claimed that the total square footage of demolished property in East Jerusalem for 2009 -- approximately 7,500 square meters -- decreased slightly from previous years, according to ICAHD statistics.

14. (C) Margalit took issue with the municipality's incorporation of minor demolitions in West Jerusalem into the

overall 2009 municipal statistics. "The fact that they use the word 'structure' is a manipulation of the facts," he claimed, adding, "in West Jerusalem, they only demolish minor additions (to existing properties). In the east, they demolish entire homes." Separately, Joel Greenberg, advocacy advisor for the Israeli NGO HaMoked, told Post he questions the municipality's attempt to equate demolitions in the east with those in the west. "The number of actual homes that came down this year is higher on the Arab side," he said. "I live in West Jerusalem, where the city dismantled my neighbor's illegally-built porch, but that is different than a house."

MUNICIPALITY: DEMOLITIONS WARRANTED,
PROCESS IMPROVING

15. (C) Tsachi Katz, the municipality's director for building licensing and enforcement, echoed concerns about the scope of demolitions in East Jerusalem. In a January 5 meeting with PolOff, Katz said that the city is working to catch East Jerusalem illegal construction in its early stages "before families move in and the emotional toll of the demolition becomes an international event." He said that the municipality is updating aerial photographic surveys -- in both East and West Jerusalem -- every three months to inspect for illegal construction.

16. (C) Katz also claimed that Arab residents of East Jerusalem also are becoming more willing to notify the municipality of illegal construction in their neighborhoods -- a phenomenon common in the western portion of the city.

JERUSALEM 00000032 002 OF 002

"They understand that building violations affect their quality of life," Katz said. "Before, no one called. Now, they call to complain, and then they call two days later to complain again." Separately, Katz said that the municipality allocates USD 1 million annually for home demolitions, although NGO contacts and home demolition victims tell Post that the municipality also generates revenue from fines levied on homeowners whose homes are demolished by the municipality.

RUBINSTEIN